

For Kate

by Derek Osborne

I had to kill someone today. Do not be alarmed, she was only real to me. Her name was Kate. She was a character in a novel I'm working on, a young girl all of seventeen, someone I'd come to know and care about these past seven years. With the press of a button she disappeared in a five thousand word tsunami — her friends, her family, the back road and restaurant where she worked — an entire chapter swept away, gone. I'd been thinking about it for some time. I didn't want to. I thought I might pare things down, Strunk it all to hell and blend her into then and after, but it was no use, the narrative no longer needed to go there. So now none of you will ever know her; none of you will feel the warmth of her smile or the way she rocked back and forth whenever anyone made her nervous, the sound in her voice when she talked of going to school and visiting France, getting out of that tiny town in Maine. None of that matters now. The need for her existence is gone; the door she came through that day is fading each passing moment, nearly closed. It feels to me like the call you get about a friend you once knew at school, someone you haven't seen in years, someone you cared for, the graveyards we carry as writers. I still see her standing behind the screen door in the cool morning air, soft morning light, the smell of the forest all around. Fair well, dear Kate — a kiss on the cheek and off you go — an honor to have imagined your grace.

